

a silent **army**

WRITTEN BY **JEANNE AGUIRRE**

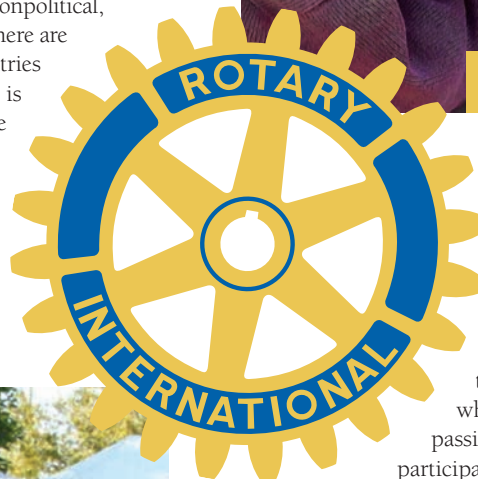
If you ever have the opportunity to speak with a Rotarian, bring a pencil and paper. Ideas, energy and excitement start to fly and you would be remiss not to try and catch them.

I had the opportunity to join the Buffalo Grove Rotary club for lunch during one of their regular Thursday afternoon lunch meetings at Lou Malnati's. Over Lou's pasta and chicken wings I was regaled with narratives and details. Try as I may to keep up with these Rotarians, the attempt to capture their enthusiasm and pride and write it down was nearly impossible.

A Rotarian is a member of Rotary International (RI). Rotary International is the world's first service club organization founded in 1905 by four Chicago tradesmen wanting to join their resources and contribute their services to help in their community, their motto being, "Service Above Self". They rotated their club meetings between their offices—hence the name, Rotary. Since then, these nonpolitical, nonreligious clubs have spread internationally and there are over 32,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas. Its nonpartisan position is why the Rotary is often times first in and on the front line to help in crises. The more than 1.2 million members focus their time and talent to help alleviate poverty, improve global health, and support education worldwide. That's just a simple sentence, but read it again. There is a lot involved in that statement - imagine what these men and women are trying to accomplish.



Mother and daughter in India after receiving the polio vaccine.



Rotarians Steve Balinski and John DeRocher at an annual Pancake Breakfast fundraiser.

Rotary International has been recognized for forging a battle against polio since 1985 and has helped bring the crippling disease to its knees. "It is a blessing that most of American kids these days do not even know what polio is" Martha Weiss, a Buffalo Grove Rotarian told me. Martha's father fell victim to polio when he was 17 and this inspired Martha's passion to fight. She traveled to India in 2005 to participate in the National Immunization Day, an event the government dedicated for volunteers to seek out children five years and younger to administer the oral vaccine. "Why do we use our financial resources to go to the polio 'hot spots' instead of simply donating it to the local Rotary clubs to use?" she asks. "We go not only to participate first hand in the project, but also to give the local volunteers a 'shot in the arm' which they could use after so many years of fighting the battle". In the 1980s, the disease infected 1,000 children every day in 125 countries. Thanks to the Rotary's program Polio Plus, in 2007, fewer than 2,000 cases were reported worldwide. To date, Rotary and its partners have contributed nearly \$700 million to the eradication effort, an amount that will grow to more than \$850 million by the time the world is certified polio-free.

Rotary International is trying to encourage peace by teaching peace to our young adults, worldwide, through their Youth Exchange program. Students apply to attend schools in different countries and live with different host families. They learn at a critical age the diversities of cultures while sharing their own traditions. The Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) program sponsors weekend leadership training programs for high school students, many from Interact (Rotary's high school age service organization) to encourage leadership of youth by youth.



To build cultural understanding and peace, club-sponsored exchange students spend a year with host families worldwide.

Rotarians strive to provide for both their local communities as well as RI worldwide causes. There are 4 universal components to their Rotary International formula:

Community—Rotary Clubs reach into their neighborhoods and find local causes to support both hands on and financially.

Rotarians sponsor such programs as micro chipping pets, bicycle safety; where children are “ticketed” for good behavior and at the end of the summer the tickets are raffled for a bicycle, special needs services and food basket programs during holiday seasons. If there is not a Rotary Park in your neighborhood, you can be sure there is one nearby supportinlocal talent and giving kids a safe place to play all year round.



A child is receiving the polio vaccine from a Rotary volunteer.

Club—On a local level, Rotary Clubs host fundraising events to assemble grants and donations for humanitarian purposes both near and far.

While most assistance in Myanmar was denied after this year’s devastating cyclone in May, Rotary was the first able to provide aid. With their non-partisan network, they provided hundreds of ShelterBox containers equipped to help a family of 10 survive for six months. A grassroots Rotary project originating from a club in Great Britain, ShelterBox has raised \$29 million and delivered aid to 40 countries in response to more than 70 disasters. The containers each cost \$1,000 to sponsor and the Rotary clubs have provided more than half of its funding.

Vocational—Rotarians are unique in that they want to be sure the local trades are being supported.

Today, the Rotary Club creates scholarships not just for college educations, but trade schools for students to learn and share back their awareness. Rotarians travel to different countries helping the indigenous people lift themselves out of poverty and toward growth. In 1998, Rotary member Steve Dudenhoefer founded, Ak’ Tenamit (New Village) in Guatemala. Ak’ Tenamit is a self governed; self sustained campus emphasizing gender equality. “It is students teaching students” Dan Wolf, a Rotarian from Highland Park who traveled to Guatemala in 2007, explained. “Regional students, decendents of the Mayans, receive an education and then return to their villages. Now skilled, they are able to educate the following generations in literacy and trade.”



Al Viehman reading to Willow Grove Elementary students.

International—Often, clubs around the world join together for jobs too big for just one.

There are countless projects and programs initiated and underway at each of the many Rotary clubs. Where help is required, the network answers the call. “One of our local clubs recently joined clubs in Liberia to install water pumps for needy areas.” Al Viehman, Buffalo Grove Rotarian, explained. “Clubs have also joined forces in Peru – raising funds and implementing over 300 rudimentary stoves with an improved method of carrying the smoke out of the huts”.

The Rotary Foundation enables Rotarians to carry out their mission to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through the improvement of health, the support of education, and the alleviation of poverty. 100% of every dollar contributed funds these projects. The organization’s administrative costs are covered by interest earned on these contributions.

I warned you to hold on to your hat. Every Rotarian has a story and each one has a glint in their eye and a catch in their voice when they start to tell it. The Rotary Clubs support so many more things not even mentioned. However, if you have made it this far, read all the above, and feel the inspiration which spurs these people on – please, consider joining. The Rotary is focused - and this year they are focusing on building up membership. It used to be that every kid had a parent in one of these clubs out there fighting to hold our neighborhoods together and trying to build a better world while having fun doing it. Now, some of us are those grown kids and we aren’t carrying our parent’s torch.

Without support, that light will die.

To learn more visit www.rotary.org or contact Rotary@edgge.com to connect you with a club in your area. Get the kids involved; look for Rotary sponsored scholarships and Interact at your local high school.



Education and distribution of water filtration systems to families in rural Guatemala assisted by Dan Wolf (in green).